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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR AF/W DESK OFFICER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO PREL GH

SUBJECT: MUSLIM OUTREACH - WRAP UP OF RAMADAN EVENTS

**¶1.** (U) Summary. U.S. Mission Accra sponsored a series of events during the recent Islamic holy month of Ramadan. The Ramadan program began with an Iftaar dinner hosted by Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates, attended by the Vice President of Ghana and all of the major Muslim leadership figures in Accra. Emboffs hosted separate Iftaars in Accra for the leadership of the various sects. The Embassy organized a number of food donations in underprivileged majority Muslim neighborhoods in Accra, nearby Tema and in Kumasi. Soccer tournaments for Muslim youth were held in Accra and Kumasi, as well as an Iftaar for Muslim religious leaders and chiefs of the Ashanti region, attended by the Regional Minister. The Deputy Chief of Mission and other embassy officers made courtesy calls on senior Muslim leaders during the course of the month, and presented book donations to Muslim-run schools in poor neighborhoods. The Muslim community greeted these events enthusiastically and saw to it that they received wide media coverage. End summary.

**¶2.** (U) Ambassador Yates's Iftaar dinner on October 25 brought together the heads of each of the major Islamic sects in Ghana, itself an uncommon occurrence, along with the Mission's Muslim contacts in government and academia. Ghana Vice President Aliu Mahama, joined the Imams at the Ambassador's head table and gave an impromptu speech to the guests, stressing the importance of America's friendship with Ghanaian Muslims. The Ambassador used the event to announce the awarding of a Department of Defense grant to fund an office building for Accra's Islamic Education Unit, an agency responsible for integrating traditional religious schools into Ghana's secular system. Ambassador Yates, in welcoming remarks, also reviewed the Mission's Muslim outreach activities over the past year and outlined plans for the coming year. The Public Affairs Officer traveled to Kumasi, Ghana's second city, with a large Muslim population, to represent the embassy at another Iftaar celebration, attended by the Ashanti region Islamic leaders, Muslim chiefs and the top government official, the Regional Minister.

**¶3.** (U) The embassy sponsored major food donations to poor communities in Accra and Kumasi that were organized with religious leaders and Muslim chiefs at ceremonies attended by the DCM and other mission officers. Another donation was co-sponsored with the students association at the Islamic University, near Accra. The food was distributed through mosques in neighborhoods of Accra, Tema and Kumasi. The DCM used the Accra event to let the audiences know that Americans were aware of the importance of Ramadan, with particular emphasis being put on care for the less fortunate members of society during the holy month. Post hopes to follow up with a food donation to Muslims in Tamale.

**¶4.** (U) With Eid el Fitr marking the end of Ramadan, the embassy, working with Muslim NGOs, sponsored a soccer tournament for Muslim youth from the greater Accra municipal area. Sixteen teams participated to play for a trophy and prizes. A similar soccer tournament was held for teams in Kumasi. The DCM kicked off the ball for the final match and awarded the prizes. Parliamentarians, local government officials and Ministry of Sports officials attended the games. These leaders expressed their appreciation for the embassy's contribution to positive activities for young people, many of whom are from the poorest and least developed urban areas in and around Ghana's capital city.

**¶5.** (U) On a less public scale, embassy officers reinforced their contacts with Muslim leaders through a series of courtesy calls during the course of the month of Ramadan. These informal get-togethers permit post officers to learn about the concerns of the Muslim community and to express to the leadership American attitudes of religious tolerance and interest in seeing Muslims participate in the development of their country. These included calls on the National Chief Imam and the Chief of the Zongo community in Kumasi. In some instances, the Public Affairs Section accompanied the visits with book donations to schools affiliated with the various Muslim sects.

**¶6.** (U) Ramadan is the logical time to intensify Mission cooperation with the Muslim community of Ghana, but post hopes to organize other activities throughout the year. For

example, as occurred last year, the embassy will sponsor a radio and TV quiz program for Muslim tertiary students, with prizes to the school of the winning team. At the next major Muslim holiday, Eid el Adha, in January, the Mission will make the traditional presentation of a ram to the National Chief Imam. At this time, post also expects to organize similar events in Tamale, the main city in Ghana's Northern Region, which has a large Muslim population. PolChief was one of only three diplomats attending the national conference to launch Ramadan, which was positively received by the Muslim community. Media coverage of these events has been quite good and public awareness of post's efforts at outreach to Ghana's Muslims is at a high level. The embassy is regularly being contacted by Muslim organizations, including some of the most conservative, to learn more about how they can participate in these programs.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: While it is difficult to quantify the impact of these programs, anecdotally post has had responses from Muslim leaders indicating that they much appreciate the Mission's outreach, which they view as exhibiting our country's respect for their religion and their local institutions. In some instances, fundamentalist Imams with negative and suspicious attitudes toward the United States have softened their language and sought to learn more about American policies and values. This has been evidenced by reports of "before and after" preaching before congregations and by invitations to visit mosques extended to Emboffs. Recently, the bimonthly magazine published by the largest conservative sect included an article on the role of religion in the U.S. elections and a feature article with a photo of post PAO speaking to the group's leadership on the importance of education for Muslim youth. These interactions, and there are numerous similar examples of effectiveness, often reflect the personal relationships that a number of post officers have developed with Ghana's Muslim leaders. They also reinforce the notion that in a traditional culture there typically is no better way to cement bonds than by dedicating many hours to face-to-face discussions, on a small and personal scale. End comment.

YATES